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ABSTRACT

Using a rhetorical approach to communication and communicative competence that defines communication as an interactive process in which people participate to achieve their goals, a study was undertaken to determine whether the communication skills postulated from the rhetorical definition could be judged independently from the linguistic skills of non-native speakers of English. Judgments on 13 communicative skills and 2 linguistic skills during a 15-minute interaction were made on 79 non-native speakers of English enrolled as students at a university. Communicative skills included description, narration, topical structure, problem solution structure, verbal repertoire, audience awareness, questions, directions, requests, focus of thought, tension level, help given, and communicative competence. Linguistic skills included speaking and listening as well as dictation, cloze total, content words, and function words derived from a paper and pencil test. Results indicated that rhetorical skills can be judged independently from linguistic skills. (HOD)

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" A Rhetorical Perspective on Communicative Competence of Speakers of English as a Second Language"

by Deborah B. Matreyek

This paper focuses on research done to clarify the conceptualization of communicative competence in non-native speakers of English. To use a language appropriately in its sociocultural settings requires communicative competence as well as linguistic competence. A review of the literature in Speech-Communication, Teaching English as a Second Language and Linguistics reveals some confusion as to the nature and definition of communicative competence, an inability to specify actual communication skills and no dependable means for judging these skills. The purpose of this paper is to report on research designed to demonstrate that the application of rhetorical theory to communicative competence provides not only a clearer definition of the concept but also a means of specifying communicative skills both of which are absent in the literature to date.

Noam Chomsky (1965) explored the concept of language competency fifteen years ago and anthropologist Dell Hymes (1972) first made the distinction between linguistic and communicative competencies almost ten years ago. It is generally agreed that linguistic competence is the tacit knowledge of the structure of the language and communicative competence involves the use of language in its sociocultural settings. However, authors are apt to emphasize different aspects of the definition of communicative competence. Sociolinguists consider the

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setting most important whereas others look only for rules of language usage. Furthermore, the definition of linguistic competence can be operationalized to provide specific linguistic skills such as rules of syntax and pronunciation. On the other hand, no current definition of communicative competence has that potential. The inability to concisely define communicative competence has resulted in an accumulation of vague, unidentifiable communication skills, some of which could even be labeled linguistic skills.

It is my contention that the source of confusion in the attempts to define communicative competence is founded in the models of communication used. A clear explanation of the process of communication must be an intrinsic part of any definition or theoretical base for communicative competence. For the purposes of this study, communication is defined as an interactive process in which people participate to achieve thier goals. This perspective of communication is rhetorical in that the individual is seen as a decision maker and designer of strategies to achieve a particular goal. To make the best or most appropriate decision on how to achieve a communicative goal, one of the things the individual requires is the knowledge of the rules of language usage in a particular setting.

This rhetorical approach to communication and communicative competence provides a base for determining specific communication skills. This study was designed to determine whether the communication skills postulated from the rhetorical definition could be judged independently from the linguistic skills of non-native speakers of English. The results would, therefore, indicate whether a rhetorical approach could provide a clearer understanding of communicative competence.

To explore the feasibility of distinguishing the linguistic and communicative skills of non-native speakers of English, an interview protocol was designed to evaluate the two sets of skills. The participants in this study were 79 non-native speakers of English enrolled as students at The Pennsylvania State University in 1976. They were beginning through advanced levels of proficiency and had not yet passed the English Language Proficiency Test administered at Penn State. The interviews were conducted by six experienced interviewers, including myself. These were evaluation interviews that are conducted every term at Penn State. However, for this occasion, the interviewers had some special training in which they were acquainted with the nature of the communicative skills to be judged. The interviews were to be viewed as interactions or conversations even more than evaluation sessions.

The interviewers made judgments on 13 communicative skills and 2 linguistic skills during a fifteen-minute interaction. The choice of communicative skills was based on the apparent goals of the participants in the interview, — the foreign student to use their "best" English, the interviewers to evaluate the skill of the student. The skills needed to accomplish those goals successfully were derived from Carroll Arnold's (1974) methods of rhetorical criticism, Roderick Hart and Donald Burks (1972) work in rhetorical sensitivity and techniques of public speaking (Bitzer,1968).

The first four communicative skills (see Table I for complete list of all the following skills)were judgments of the interviewee's ability to use different verbal structures. Visual materials and specific questions were asked to elicit the use of chronological, spatial, problem-solution and topical structures.

Skill #5 is the interviewee's verbal repetoire which relates to the individual's ability to express the same idea in a different way.

Audience awareness, skill6, concerns the attempts the interviewee made to determine if the interviewer understood what he/shewas saying.

Skills 7 - 9 are designed to indicate how well the interviewee met the changing demands of the situation. The changing demands in the interview are the different verbal structures used by the interviewers. The use of questions, directions and requests requires different responses.

As a vital partner in the interaction, the interviewer wasasked to provide a general assessment of his/her participation in the interaction which are skills 10 - 12. Skill 10 involves how well the interviewee was able to have the interviewer think about what he/she was actually saying (content). If the interviewer was able to forget about the primary goal of evaluation, then the interviewee would have a higher level of competency. Skill 11 is a judgment about how much tension the interviewer felt during the interaction. If the student was difficult to talk to and the interviewer had to work hard, then the tension would be high and competency low. Skill 12 also relates to how hard the interviewer had to work,but in a more specific way. A judgment is made concerning how much assistance was provided to keep the flow of conversation going and to help maintain understanding in the situation. The assumption is that the more help provided the lower the competency of the interviewee.

Finally, skill 13 was an overall judgment of the interviewee's communicative competence. What was sought was a global judgment based on the interviewee's overall performance in the situation.

These skills were judged on scales of 1 - 5. The two oral linguistic skills (see Table I), rated speaking and rated listening, were also judged on the same kind of scales. Additional data on linguistic skills were obtained by a paper and pencil test given

to the participants. The last four scores were derived from this English Language Proficiency Test. This data on these 19 variables was submitted to a factor analysis, the reliability of the communicative skills test was assessed by a two-way analysis of variance and, also, the interscorer reliability was tested.

There were 4 factors that accounted for 75% of the common variance and the criterion level for significant factor loading was set at a .5 level. The first factor (see Table II) had 11 of the 19 variables above criterion level. These 11 items are from the communicative competence test. Factor II (see TableIII) contains variables from one part of the proficiency test and factor III (see Table III) contains 2 items from the communicative competence test and the two judgments made on oral linguistic skill. Lastly, factor IV (see Table III) had only one variable above criterion, dictation, which was also part of the proficiency test.

The significant loadings on factor I are by far the most interesting, especially in contrast to the other factors. Of the postulated communicative skills, it appears that eleven measure a skill that can be identified independently from the others. This set of skills might be termed rhetorical skills. Factor II seems to indicate a linguistic oral skill, Factors II and IV also indicate the measurement of linguistic skill or also overall proficiency in English.

Further validation of these results comes from the fact that the reliability coefficient for the communicative competence test was .94, indicating that the test was highly internally consistent. Interscorer reliability was done on the basis of 19 participants being interviewed twice, The correlation coefficients for each item were moderate to low. Limited consistency is understandable since

each interviewer brought slightly different communication skills to the interviews which would cause some variation in the judgments made about the interactions.

The results of this study must be considered in light of the limitation imposed by a factor analysis. This statistical procedure can isolate common characteristics across variables, but it does not identify what those common characteristics are. Therefore, any labels I have used for the factors are tenative pending further research.

The overall purpose of the study was to explore the validity of applying rhetorical theory to communicative competence. By specifically defining communication as a rhetorical act and, thus, providing the basis for isolating skills, I found that these rhetorical skills can be judged independently from linguistic skills. A rhetorical perspective was the means to clearly distinguish between the two language competencies which few other authors have been able to do to date. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, further validation research is needed. Currently, there are two dissertations being done that are exlporing further the application of rhetorical theory to communicative competence.

TABLE I

A LIST OF THE VARIABLES

Communicative skills	Linguistic skills
1. Description	14. Rated Speaking
2. Narration	15. Rated Listening
3. Topical Structure	16. Dictation
4. Problem Solution Structure	17. Cloze Total
5. Verbal Repetoire	18. Content Words
6. Audience Awareness	19. Function Words
7. Questions	
8. Directions	
9. Requests	
10. Focus of Thought	
11. Tension Level	
12. Help Given	
13. Communicative Competence	

TABLE II

FACTOR I OF THE ROTATED MATRIX OF FACTOR LOADINGS

Variables	Factor I
3. Topical Structure	.80
4. Problem Solution Structure	.72
5. Verbal Repetoire	.67
6. Audience Awareness	.78
7. Questions	.65
8. Directions	.75
9. Requests	.80
10. Focus of Thought	.63
11. Tension Level	.81
12. Help Given	.80
13. Communicative Competence	.70
% of Variance	34%

TABLE III

FACTORS II, III, IV OF THE ROTATED MATRIX OF FACTOR LOADINGS

Variables	Factors II	III	IV
1. Description		.63	
2. Narration		.73	
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14. Rated Speaking		.76	
15. Rated Listening		.83	
16. Dictation			.82
17. Cloze Total	.96		
18. Content Words	.90		
19. Function Words	.86		
% of Variance	16%	18%	7%

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